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LETTER TO ALL RESPIRATOR MANUFACTURERS

Subject: NIOSH Policy for Respirator Sealing Surfaces and Facial Hair

It has been brought to the attention of NIOSH through phone calls and emails from respirator users and manufacturers that some respirator manufacturers may not understand what NIOSH defines as the sealing surface for respirators and consequently are inappropriately marketing respirators for users with facial hair.

Facial hair that lies along the sealing area of a respirator, such as beards, sideburns, or mustaches will interfere with respirators that rely on a tight facepiece fit to achieve maximum protection. The areas of the skin, which contact the face or neck seal and nose cup seal, must be free of any hair.

If a unit has been approved with a nose cup in place and has passed NIOSH CO₂ and fogging tests using the nose cup, then the nose cup must not come in contact with facial hair, even if there is another seal being used as the primary seal (such as a neck seal). Specifically, respirator configurations using hood-style facepieces that have been tested and certified by NIOSH using a nose cup require a clean-shaven sealing surface at the nose cup.

Any respirator manufacturer making false claims such as advertising a tight fitting, full facepiece or hooded SCBA unit that is configured with a nose cup, for users with facial hair, may be subject to rescission of NIOSH approval.

Sincerely yours,

Heinz W. Ahlers
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